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The Second Edition of the Sofia Numismatic School – 2025

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The Archaeological Research base at the ancient Roman colony of Deultum in Bulgaria (Burgas region) hosted the Second edition of the Sofia Numismatic School (SNS). The event was held from the 10th to the 15th of September 2025 and was attended by an international team of thirteen highly acclaimed scholars, researchers, and fifteen students from Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Moldova, the Netherlands, Romania, Poland, the UK, and Bulgaria.

The forum was made possible through the partnership and collaboration of a number of institutions such as the Faculty of History at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", the National Archaeological Reserve Deultum–Debelt, the Municipal Historical Museum of Sredets, and with the generous support of the SUMMIT project (Sofia University Marking Momentum for Innovation and Technological Transfer),[1] the basic research project "Upgrading the Historical Narrative: From *Deultum* to **DigiDeultum**", led by Prof. Lyudmil Vagalinski (Project № КП-06-Н80/7 from 08.12.2023, BNSF),[2] as well as the scientific project "BGR 1074508 HFST: Ancient Coins Counterfeits Scientific Network (ACCS Network): Digital Assets for Prevention of Cultural Heritage Forgery", funded by Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, led by Prof. Dr. Sc. Dilyana Boteva.[3] As with the first edition of SNS 2023, which was established during the implementation of the "Measuring Ancient Thrace" research project (№ КП-06-Н50/3 from 2020, BNSF), the DigiThrace web platform provided the web space needed for communicating the SNS 2025 event.[4]

The key individuals involved in organising, administering and the successful conduct of the forum were the chief director of the event Prof. Dr. Dr.Sc. Dilyana Boteva, from the department of Ancient History, Thracian Studies and Medieval History at the Sofia University "St Kliment Ohridski", as well as Krasimira Kostova, chief director of the Municipal Historical Museum of Sredets.

The intense 5-day agenda included lectures, workshops, practical studies and training with authentic numismatic material and forgeries, as well as study trips to landmark archaeological

[1] https://summit.uni-sofia.bg/
[2] https://digideultum.eu/
[3] https://accs-network.com/
[4] https://digithrace.uni-sofia.bg/sofia-numismatic-school-2/

sites in the region – the Archaeological Museums in Burgas, Nesebar and Sozopol and the modern City Library of Burgas. The Sofia Numismatic School schedule covered many aspects of ancient coinage, with a focus on Thrace and the Black Sea region. The event provided students with unlimited opportunities to delve into the world of ancient coins and created a friendly networking environment.

Fig. 1. The participants in the SNS 2025 at the archaeological site of Deultum. Photo credit: Lily Grozdanova.

Fig. 2. Opening speech of Prof. Dr. Dr.Sc. Dilyana Boteva and introductory lecture of Prof. Christopher Howgego. Photo credit: Julia Tzvetkova.

The Academic Sessions

The opening session of the first day, 10th September, was presided by the hosts at the archaeological base of Deultum and combined a tour of the archaeological site and lectures by Prof. Lyudmil Vagalinski, as one of the excavation directors of Deultum, and the director of the museum of Sredets, Krasimira Kostova. They introduced the participants to the archaeological context at Deultum and provided a special focus on the fortifications, the *termae,* and the *necropoleis*. All participants had the opportunity to tour the excavations and examine the urban planning of the ancient Roman colony.

The well-organized research infrastructure of the archaeological base of Deultum was more

than fitting to host all academic panels from the scientific event. The main focus in SNS 2025 was placed on the contemporary development of digital numismatics, which was highlighted in the first-day presentations of Prof. Christopher Howgego, Dr. Ulrike Peter and Assist. Prof. Dr. Lily Grozdanova.

In his first lecture, Prof. Howgego provided the students with a detailed insight into the Coin Hoards of the Roman Empire project.[5] Prof. Howgego demonstrated how the information provided by hoards has the potential to transform the understanding of coin supply, circulation and use, and may as well have implications on the study of the Roman economy as a whole.

A second lecture of Prof. Howgego was devoted to the coin hoards from Thrace and the Black Sea region in a wider Roman imperial context. A major topic in the discourses was the role of the Roman imperial army as an economic factor and a factor for coin circulation and distribution.

Dr. Ulrike Peter and Assist. Prof. Dr Lily Grozdanova not only introduced the students to the fundamentals of Digital Numismatics, its development, achievements and potential, but also provided a theoretical basis for young scholars' future work in the field of digital humanities. Special attention was given to the research on coin iconography within the newly launched scientific project Imagines Nummorum (ImagNum)[6] at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, and to the contribution of modern technologies to the quantitative and qualitative analysis of obverse and reverse iconographic themes. The students were further acquainted with the chronological aspects of the Roman provincial coinage of Thrace and Lower Moesia. Special emphasis was placed on the coin iconography and the chronological clues it can provide.

Two follow-up workshops, introduced students to digital tools for coin processing and digital platforms for coin analysis.

The SNS 2025 academic agenda was designed in such a manner as to entice the students to acquire knowledge on the development of ancient coinage and its preceding pre-monetary forms in the region of Thrace and the Black sea. The chronological timeframe of the academic panels in the next 4 days covered a vast period starting with the Chalcolithic era and ending in Late Antiquity.

Prof. Dr. Dr.Sc. Ilya Prokopov and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Valentina Grigorova-Gencheva acquainted the students with probably the earliest pre-monetary forms in the Bulgarian lands. The scholars hypothesised the existence of a trade network and quasi-monetized economy associated with the Varna Chalcolithic culture, dating back to the 5th millennium BC. The small gold rings most likely the earliest medium of exchange in the ancient lands of modern Bulgaria, provoked lively discussions and debate among all participants.

The discourse on the pre-monetary forms and the transition towards monetary forms was later continued by one of the leading expert on the coin circulation of the Western Mediterranean - Assoc. Prof. Mariangela Puglisi. The Italian researcher drew a parallel between the circulation of weighted metal as a medium of exchange in the western Mediterranean area and that in the Black sea region.

The development of the Black sea region from the Archaic to the beginning of the Roman period was the background for the lecture held by Prof. Habil. Vladimir Stolba who focused on Greek colonies in the Northern and Western Pontic area – the last major region colonized by the Greek city states. Prof. Stolba's presentation inspired scholars and students alike to ponder on the ability of coinage to complement ancient historiography and its potential to fill *lacunae* in the historical narrative.

The main events and processes related to the historical development of Thrace from the Archaic period to Late Antiquity were masterfully recreated, analysed and summarized by Prof. Dilyana Boteva. Among other topics, her overview discussed "Thracians" from the perspective of ancient historical sources, criteria for historical periodization in the Thracian lands, coinage and main historical events within the "Thrace of the Emperors" period. The lecture provided the

[5] https://chre.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/
[6] https://www.imagines-nummorum.eu/de

young scholars with the theoretical basis for their future research in history and numismatics of Ancient Thrace.

Acad. Prof. François de Callataÿ presented an in-depth lecture on the monetary production and coin circulation in Thrace, as well as their key distinctive features. The leading expert on Hellenistic coinage discussed the influx of monetized precious metals in Thrace and reflected on countermarks, unique monetary words in the legend and monumentalized inscriptions on the obverse of the coinages of Thrace. The discourse invoked discussion on topics such as whether coinages of Thrace were minted in Greek cities and whether Thracian dynasties had family badges modelled on Greek iconography. Prof. de Callataÿ delivered a second talk which focused on two massive and unparalleled Hellenistic influxes of monetized precious metals in present-day Bulgaria. The aim of the presentation was to place these influxes in a specific historical context.

As a follow-up to the lecture on the monetary production and coin circulation in Thrace presented by Prof. de Callataÿ, the leading Bulgarian numismatist Prof. Dr. Dr.Sc. Ilya Prokopov provided an insight on the abundant coinage of barbarized tetradrachms in Thrace in the mid-1st century BC. Prof. Prokopov drew attention to the legends on several coin series, which may indicate the names of unknown Thracian dynasts or figures of local significance, and encouraged the participants to discuss the economic rise of Thrace or a hidden Roman monetary policy as alternatives leading to this situation.

In a second talk within the SNS 2025, Prof. Dilyana Boteva introduced the students to the chronological aspects of the Roman provincial coinage of Thrace and Lower Moesia. Special emphasis was given to the coin iconography and the chronological clues that it can provide.

The students' attention on the final day of the SNS was devoted to the lectures of Assoc. Prof. Dario Calomino and Prof. Habil. Cristian Găzdac. Assoc.

Prof. Dario Calomino continued the topic of the city mints in Thrace and the Black Sea region and illustrated patterns of production and models of die sharing. His insights on the imperial image in Thrace and the Black Sea Region through the lens of local coinage were the highlight of his second report (a concept connected to the development of the ERC RESP project[7]).

The academic sessions were closed with two thought-provoking presentations of Prof. Habil. Cristian Gazdac. The curious and impressive presentations focused on hoards composed of 2nd – 3rd century AD coins but buried in much later contexts within the Carpathian basin, as well as on the Roman monetary policy on the Lower Danube. Prof. Găzdac's lectures fuelled extensive discussions which marked an apt conclusion to the days of intense debate.

The above is only a brief summary of the topics covered by the remarkable lecturing team at Deultum. In addition to the extensive and invaluable knowledge, each speaker contributed to the SNS 2025 with his/her specific and personal style, character and presence on the podium of the "Amphora Hall" at the archaeological research base.

Fig. 3. Students and attendees of SNS 2025 at the "Amphora Hall" of the Deultum archaeological base. Photo credit: François de Callataÿ.

[7] https://ercresp.info/

Fig. 4. Prof. François de Callataÿ lecturing on the monetary production and coin circulation in Thrace. Photo credit: Lily Grozdanova.

The Workshop sessions

The other main pillar of the schedule of Second Sofia Numismatic School were the opportunities for students to work with and examine various ancient coins at first hand. As of day one, the programme included a number of practice focused sessions. The initial sections on introduction to digital numismatics smoothly transitioned into detailed demonstration of digital tools for coin processing and digital platforms for coin analysis.

The SNS provided the opportunity to test three modifications of the state of the art equipment for coin photography and recording – QuickPX Classic, QuickPX Extended and QuickPX Travel. These specific systems combine both hardware and software solutions which have become indispensable to the contemporary numismatist and his research. All three systems were acquired at the Bulgarian scientific institutions of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and the National Archaeological Institute with Museum at BAS as a result of the successful implementation of scientific research projects such as "Measuring Ancient Thrace", led by Assoc. Prof. Julia Tzvetkova (Project № КП-06-Н50/3 from 2020),[8] "Upgrading the Historical Narrative: From *Deultum* to **DigiDeultum**", led by Prof. Lyudmil Vagalinski (Project № КП-06-Н80/7 from 2023) and "The Gluhite Kamani Research Project", led by Assoc. Prof. Georgi Nekhrizov (Project № КП-06-Н80/6 from 2023)[9], all funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund.

As a first step, the students were introduced to the assembly, structure and operating mechanisms of the hardware and software components. The students were then provided with the opportunity to observe and classify various Classical, Hellenistic and Roman era coins from the Deultum coin collection under the expert guidance of the SNS lecturers and with the kind and skilful assistance of the Deultum archaeological team. All students were allocated to one of the lecturing staff and received a total of up to 3 ancient coins each.

An important aspect of the practice was a workshop led by Prof. Dr. Dr.Sc. Ilya Prokopov, dedicated to the study and analysis of coin forgeries and their juxtaposition with the actual ancient samples. The session was directly connected and supported by the activities within the DARIAH-ERIC project "Mistakes as a source of knowledge: ACCSN 2.0", led by Lily Grozdanova[10], focused on the development of expertise and the prevention of the spread of non-original numismatic objects.

The workshops within the SNS ensured that the theoretical knowledge acquired during the academic sessions was instantly applied in corresponding case studies. This approach was enhanced further by the fact that students worked side by side with some of the most globally recognised numismatists.

[8] https://digithrace.uni-sofia.bg/
[9] http://gluhite-kamani-project.naim.bg/en/home-gk-english/
[10] https://accs-network.com/2024/12/28/mistakes-as-a-source-of-knowledge-accsn-2-0/

Fig. 5. Assoc. Prof. Julia Tzvetkova and Habil. Prof. Vladimir Stolba introducing the student to the assembly and functionalities of the equipment for coin photography and classification. Photo credit: Alexander Moskov.

Fig. 6. Prof. Dr. Dr.Sc. Ilya Prokopov, leading the workshop on coin forgeries. Photo credit: Mariangela Puglisi.

Fig. 7. The students experiencing the equipment for coin photography and recording. Photo credit: Lily Grozdanova.

The Study trips

Naturally, the participants and their SNS experience were not limited and confined to the Archaeological Research Base at Deultum. As already noted above, the agenda included visits to a number of museums in the region. Both students and lecturing staff were delighted to take the tour of the archaeological museums in Burgas, Nesebar and Sredets. In each of these museums, the participants were accompanied by the professional and friendly museum staff who provided valuable information on the collections and artefacts. The study visits widened the knowledge of

the young scholars in respect to the history of Bulgaria, and more specifically the Burgas Region from Antiquity until modern times.

A breath-taking and one-of-a-kind stop was the trip to "St. St. Cyricus and Julita" island – the cult centre of Ancient Apollonia, located in the area of the port of Sozopol.

These trips became possible due to our kind hosts: Dr. Milen Nikolov, the director of the Regional History Museum of Burgas, Todor Marvakov, the director of the Ancient Nesebar Museum, Dimitar Nedev, the director of the Archaeological Museum of Sozopol, and the excavation team at "St. St. Cyricus and Julita" archaeological site – Assoc. Prof. Dr. Krastina Panayotova, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Margarit Damyanov, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivan Valchev, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Daniela Stoyanova.

Fig. 8. Taking the tour of the ancient Roman colony of Deultum. Photo credit: Julia Tzvetkova.

Fig. 9. Visiting the excavations at "St. St. Cyricus and Julita" archaeological site. Photo credit: Julia Tzvetkova.

Fig. 10. Visiting the exposition at the Archaeological museum in Nesebar. Photo credit: Lily Grozdanova.

An ambitious and successful venture

The Sofia Numismatic School is an initiative which was established and flourished owing to the energetic and hard-working team of professionals and scholars from Bulgaria and abroad. The first edition in 2023 paved the opportunities and potential the SNS had in its mission: to enlighten, educate and create the next generation of ancient numismatists. It has also transformed into one of the key stages in the development of ancient numismatics in Bulgaria and earning the country's rightful place as a leading global partner.

The second edition of the SNS in 2025 surpassed all expectations and proved that the years of effort and dedication have established the initiative as a fundamental event not only in Bulgaria but on an international basis. The Organization Committee is delighted that this result not only corresponds to the goals set by the National strategy for scientific research development in the Republic of Bulgaria 2017-2030 but that the achievements and outcomes of the SNS 2025 will echo far beyond the borders of Bulgaria.

The event provided students with unlimited opportunities to explore the world of ancient coins and created a friendly networking environment, which we hope will last for years to come. We believe that the Organizational Committee and our friends at the archaeological base in Deultum did our best to create the background, necessary for a vivid and thrilling experience, which will set the standards for future events such as this.